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ABSTRACT

Marketing has become a popular strategic initiative among state extension services to meet the growing demand for program accountability. The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) began a formative evaluation of its marketing efforts as a step toward a comprehensive marketing plan. All extension faculty were surveyed to determine their perceptions of the marketing tools (MTs) of the organization, using a modified version of W. Boldt's marketing audit to rate 41 items on a 5-point Likert scale. Responses of 341 LCES faculty (a 77.5 percent response rate) were ranked to display the relative importance of 5 MT categories (teaching methods, office-related, decision-related, programming-related, and visual). Each MT was also ranked within its category. MTs at the core of teaching (communication/teaching skills and educational products) were considered most important. Organizational logos, personal business cards, and name tags, which have a visual effect, were considered less important. Office-related MTs ranked second, followed by MTs designed to reach local and state governing boards and elected officials. Mission and impact statements and the extension advisory system (programming-related MTs) ranked fourth. The LCES does not have a comprehensive marketing strategy, although scattered efforts have been made. Implications for development of a comprehensive approach are described. (SLD)

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UTILIZING EVALUATION TO DEVELOP A MARKETING STRATEGY IN THE LOUISIANA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

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Introduction

In the mid to late 1980s, "Extension Marketing" became a popular strategic initiative among state Extension Services to meet the growing demand for program accountability. The aim was to increase program visibility and credibility and convey an organizational image of educational relevance, success and value as perceived by clientele.

New York was one state that drew upon marketing research in the private sector to develop a planned extension marketing program (Boldt, 1988). The research showed that over 2,000 companies had changed their names to create a new, unifying image (Kovach, 1985). A unique organizational identity, i.e., a company's definition, direction and distinctiveness as perceived by its various publics was also found to be crucial (Lebrman, 1986). Based on these findings, New York developed a new name, logo, outreach materials and a training program to project a unified, consistent, and unique image. Extrapolating from this experience and citing the plans of other states such as Oregon, North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota and others, Boldt maintains that state Extension Services have no option but to practice marketing if they are to present a unifying image, and suggests that the only choice they have is " . . . whether to practice it through a planned, consistent approach or through an unplanned, fragmented approach" (p 28).

Boldt (1986) suggests that extension marketing should be guided by a philosophy that is based in its educational mission, actively involves all paid staff and volunteers and promotes the organization as a whole, rather than specific programs. Therefore, an effective marketing plan must include the entire Extension organization, focus on the development of programs that meet the needs of clientele, and encourage a strong relationship with key public officials and community leaders.

In the later years of the 1980s, the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) initiated selected marketing efforts to raise faculty awareness of and sensitivity to the organization's image and programs as perceived by clientele so as to begin and continue use of marketing tools. However, these efforts were not part of an overall and definite marketing plan for the organization, with distinct internal and external objectives and strategies. It was felt that a formative evaluation of these "marketing efforts" would be useful in developing a comprehensive marketing plan while increasing faculty awareness and commitment to the process.

Methodology

The evaluation of LCES marketing efforts took the form of a survey of all Extension faculty to determine their perception of the importance of marketing tools being used in the organization. The survey instrument was a modified version of Boldt's marketing audit of an organization which is recommended to be used periodically

to determine organizational strengths and weaknesses (1992). The audit was adapted to account for unique features and marketing efforts of the LCES.

The survey asked faculty to rate 41 items identified as marketing tools as to their importance in an overall Extension marketing program. A five-point Likert scale of extremely important, very important, important, slightly important, and not important was used. The set of marketing tools was organized into five categories - visual, office-related, decision-maker involvement, teaching methods and programming-related. These categories were placed in the survey in the above order because it was felt that faculty would readily recognize the first category, visual, as marketing tools while the last category, programming-related, may be less readily perceived as part of a marketing strategy.

An open-ended question sought ideas from the faculty regarding the overall marketing effort.

The survey was field tested among selected Extension faculty and administrators for face validity and revisions made in the final version.

A cover letter was mailed to all 440 Extension faculty indicating that the Director of Extension was initiating the survey and explaining the purpose and content of the survey. Confidentiality of responses was stressed. Respondents were supplied with a pre-addressed, postage paid envelope and requested to respond within two weeks. A total of 341 (77.5%) responded.

Importance expressed by respondents with regard to each marketing tool on the five-point response scale was averaged and a mean importance statistic calculated. Category means for the five categories were determined by averaging the item means in each category. Rank importance of the categories and items within each category was based on the size of the means. The data are presented for categories and for items within each category.

Besides the ranking procedure, the following interpretive scale was established to evaluate whether the item should be considered in planning the marketing program:

Mean Importance	Marketing Program Plan Consideration
Greater than 4.00	Must be considered
3.00 - 4.00	Important to consider
2.00 - 2.99	Marginal to consider
Less than 2.00	Need not consider

Findings

The relative importance and rank of the five marketing tools categories is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean Importance and Rank of Marketing Tools Categories

Marketing Tools Category	Mean Importance (a)	Rank
Teaching Methods (13)	4.25	1
Office-Related (7)	4.22	2
Decision-Related (7)	4.09	3
Programming-Related (6)	3.80	4
Visual (8)	3.32	5

Table 1 (cont'd)

(a) Derived from importance rating given to each marketing tool and averaged for all tools in the category. Importance rating scale: 5 = Extremely Important; 4 = Very Important; 3 = Important; 2 = Slightly Important; 1 = Not Important. Figure in parentheses is number of marketing tools included in each category used to compute category mean.

It is interesting that marketing tools at the core of the teaching process, such as communication/teaching skills and educational products, were considered most important, while marketing tools like organizational logos, personal business cards and name tags which have a visual effect were considered less important. Office-related marketing tools such as location, exterior and interior appearance, ranked second, followed by tools designed to reach local and state governing boards and elected officials. Mission and impact statements and the extension advisory system included in the programming-related marketing tools, ranked fourth.

The relative importance and rank of each marketing tool based on importance within the several categories is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean Importance and Rank of Marketing Tools by Category

Marketing Tool	Mean (a) Importance	Rank
Teaching Methods-Related Tools		
Quality of Extension materials	4.73	1
Quality of programs and services	4.70	2
Quality of communications skills	4.60	3
Consistency of Extension materials	4.57	4
Conciseness of Extension materials	4.52	5
Employee's ability to describe organizational identity	4.27	6
System for working with the media	4.24	7
Subject matter newsletter	4.10	8
Volunteer's ability to describe organizational identity	3.95	9
Client's ability to describe organizational identity	3.89	10
Video programs	3.75	11
Promotional newsletter	3.69	12
Slide programs	3.67	13
Office-Related Tools		
Telephone book listing	4.58	1
Way phones are answered	4.40	2
Office information or reception area	4.27	3
Office sign(s)	4.21	4
Location of office	4.09	5
Personal office appearance	4.09	5
Exterior of office	3.87	6

Table 2 (cont'd)

Decision-Maker Related Tools		
Annual reports to police jury/school board	4.29	1
Decision-maker communication	4.28	2
Decision-maker receiving educ. materials	4.14	3
Decision-maker involvement in educ. programs	3.99	4
Legislative appreciation function	3.99	4
Police jury convention display	3.98	5
Superintendent's breakfast	3.93	6
Programming Related marketing Tools		
Subject matter advisory committees	4.06	1
Parish advisory council	3.93	2
Program planning system	3.81	3
Extension mission statement	3.79	4
Issues-based programming	3.65	5
Impact statement describing program impact	3.56	6
Visual Marketing Tools		
Professional dress	4.40	1
LCES logo	3.90	2
Business card	3.88	3
Name tags	3.56	4
LCES vinyl portfolio	3.29	5
Green LCES pocket folder	3.01	6
LSU Agricultural Center cap	2.30	7
LCES blazers	2.20	8

(a) Importance rating scale: 5 = Extremely Important; 4 = Very Important; 3 = Important; 2 = Slightly Important; 1 = Not Important.

Comparing mean importance ratings with the interpretive scale developed for the study, it can be seen that all marketing tools except two that were ranked lowest in the visual tools category should be considered in an extension marketing strategy. The spread of means between the lowest and highest ranked items in each category was small, between .5 to 1.0 point on the 5-point scale, suggesting homogeneity of perception.

In response to the open-ended question requesting ideas on the LCES's overall marketing effort, 131 respondents (40%) submitted 258 comments. Table 3 gives the responses most frequently mentioned:

Table 3. Faculty ideas regarding Extension's overall marketing effort

Idea	Number of Mentions
Importance of professionalism	25
Importance of television/mass media public service announcements	23
Importance of identifying marketing plan	20
Importance of decision-maker involvement	19
Need to change style, design, color of cap	16
Importance of LCES identity	15
Importance of quality programs/activities	12
Importance of consistent local office telephone listings	12
Importance of meeting the needs of people	10
Need to change color of LCES name tags	9
Need for adequate office equipment	8
Need for communications agents in the field	7
Importance of advisory committee input	7
Importance of upgrading communications skills	7

Professionalism in dress and actions was seen to be important in an Extension marketing program. Television PSA's to reach a larger and more non-traditional audience, and better faculty understanding of and commitment to an identified Extension marketing program were also important. Decision-maker involvement in Extension programs was also considered critical.

Implications of the Evaluation for Planning an LCES Marketing Strategy

By following the evaluation process the researcher was able to frame the appropriate evaluation question, involve concerned stakeholders and gather information which would be used in developing a marketing strategy for the LCES.

The evaluation focused on the question: Does the LCES have a comprehensive marketing strategy? The intuitive answer from organizational experience was that scattered marketing efforts had been made in the last several years, but there was not in place a coherent, well-thought-out plan of action. This pointed to the need for the evaluation.

It was considered that the LCES faculty was a critical stakeholder in any marketing strategy because they would be primarily responsible for its planning and implementation. Therefore, it was decided to determine faculty perception of the importance of LCES's marketing efforts (tools).

Besides faculty involvement, administrative support and funding to do the study was secured.

In utilizing findings of the evaluation to develop LCES's marketing strategy, the following considerations are relevant.

1. An interpretive scale was developed in analyzing the study data for use as a selection/decision screen for including marketing tools in strategy planning. Applying this interpretation to the findings, the pros and cons

of practically all marketing tools should be considered in the strategy. Unfavorable responses to two marketing items (cap and blazer) appear to stem from the materials produced, rather than the concept behind these tools.

2. The overall marketing strategy should contain a long-range marketing plan, with shorter-term plans fitting into the long-range plan. The following aspects should be considered in planning:

Organizational objectives
Client-oriented objectives
Resources needed
Plan of action
Faculty training

3. It would appear that the conceptual framework of marketing tools categories may be useful for planning and communicating plans to staff. Specifically, the following themes appeared important in these categories and could be considered in the planning effort:

a. Producing quality extension educational materials, programs and services.

b. Promoting understanding of organizational identity and increasing communication skills on the part of extension faculty and volunteers.

c. Utilizing interaction opportunities with decision makers.

d. Involving extension audiences in program development.

e. A sense and display of professionalism among extension faculty.

4. Consideration may be given to the establishment of an LCES Marketing Task Force to develop the marketing plan, monitor its implementation, and evaluate the marketing effort.

5. Administrative commitment has been strong from the outset. It is important that this administrative commitment be continued and, if necessary, increased to support the development and implementation of an organization-wide marketing strategy. In securing this kind of commitment, the positive faculty response to the Extension marketing concept as shown by the study would be helpful.

6. It is important for the faculty to understand and make a commitment to the organization's declared mission, positive image and unique identity as well as understand the full scope of the proposed marketing strategy. It is also important for the faculty to adopt a continuing stance of communicating to clientele Extensions's uniqueness, identity and program impacts.

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